

A photograph of a rusty, dark metal nail with a cross-shaped head, lying diagonally on a light-colored wooden surface. A pool of bright red liquid, resembling blood, is smeared on the wood around the lower part of the nail. The word "JESUS" is written in a stylized red font with a white outline in the upper left, and "THE FORGIVER" is written in the same style in the lower right.

JESUS

THE FORGIVER

Cover image: Not an original idea but an original picture by MW. The nail is a square section Roman nail, similar to the ones used in the Crucifixion. It was given to me by a colleague when I worked on Bridge corrosion. It comes from the Inchtuthil hoard (Scotland) dated around AD 90.

Just after the fall of Jerusalem (AD 70), the Roman Empire relocated its Legions. Rather than let the nails fall into the hands of the “enemy”, they buried them. The outer nails corroded providing a crust over the others which preserved them into the 20th Century.



I wonder if the artisan who made the nails used in the crucifixion of Jesus, ever knew the part he played in our lives?

1Jn_1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the **blood** of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from **ALL** sin.

Letting go

1Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Our text jumps right in at the heart of the issue of forgiveness. Can anyone be forgiven who doesn't own up to sin? Can we truly forgive anyone who doesn't acknowledge their sin to us? Is there any sin that we cannot forgive or be forgiven of? Firstly though, let's look at the word for forgive.

One of the ways that we determine what a word means is to see how it is used in context. The word forgive has a number of meanings (ἀφίημι *aphiēmi*) to cry, forgive, forsake, lay aside, leave, let (alone, be, go, have), omit, put (send) away, remit, suffer, yield up. *Mat 4:20 They left (forgave) their nets... Mat 5:24 Leave (forgive) your gift....Mat 8:15 the fever left (forgave) her....Mat 13:30 Let (forgive) both grow together....Mat 18:12 ..doth he not leave (forgive) the ninety and nine..*

Forgiveness is leaving or laying aside something.

Forgiveness can relate to different situations. We can forgive when we are owed a debt. We can forgive it and wipe it out. It is “forgiving those that trespass against us”. It would be an attitude to someone who, for example, had damaged our property or person. This is, I believe, at the root of Peter's question on forgiveness, *Mat 18:21 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?* We must see Peter's question to Jesus in the context of Matthew 18. First there is a warning of causing offences (scandal=stumbling), sins committed against you (within the church, that is NOT by unbelievers) and then, how to deal with sins by confronting them. Some people do not like this and I have seen a lot of self-made martyrs who bear the offences against them in pious silence, as if it is a virtue. It is not a virtue, these things

must be dealt with. Peter doesn't question the concept of forgiveness and bringing sin to light, he wants to know if you get to a point where you give up on forgiveness.

Jesus explains in the story that the lord of the house had compassion on the man who asked for time to repay. *Mat 18:27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.* In fact that lord went much further and cleared the debt. He forgave the debt. Would he have done this without any request from the debtor who induced his sympathy? We also note that it was conditional forgiveness, however, because the man did not show the same compassion he was made to pay the debt, *Mat 18:34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.*

Peter's lesson is this. If someone sins against me and asks my forgiveness, I must not act like the servant who refused to forgive the fellow servants. My Lord forgave me and I must behave to others in the same manner. It shows that I have learned the lesson of infinite mercy. Now, try and think of the worst sin that could be committed against you. Say you are a wife whose husband has committed adultery and he comes and asks for forgiveness, what do you do? Then a year later he lapses and does it again, what do you do? Could you live with this cycle of sin and forgiveness? You know someone who has maligned you and they ask for forgiveness, you forgive and then a month later they come back and ask again. They have sinned against you again, what do you do?

You say, I'm not sure I can go on forgiving someone who keeps going against me and who keeps sinning against me. Well, stand back and see your relationship with God. Have you sinned today, yesterday, the day before? God lives with people that continually sin against Him. *1Jn 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.* Yet God continues to forgive us despite the litany of daily horrors we commit. *1Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.* If God can do it so MUST we. It is not an option of our Christian life.

So what is your attitude to the person that you have forgiven? "I can forgive them but never trust them again", "I still resent their attitude to me", "I can't forget what they did". If these are true, you never forgave them. You have not let the sin go and it eats at you and causes you to muckrake. You are still carrying the hurt of sin and the pains of betrayal. **You now have the problem.** Is this the sort of forgiveness you want from God? The thought that God hasn't really let the sins go away does not make for an open relationship and one where lingering doubts remain is not Divine forgiveness.

No limits

*Mat 18:34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. Mat 18:35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye **from your hearts** forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*

We need to suffer from cardiac forgiveness that pulses from the depths of our body, not a shallow, superficial "sorry". I ended last time asking how you would like to be forgiven? I think that the answer is, as if nothing had ever happened. Zachariah means "Jah has remembered" but when it

comes to forgiveness God forgets, *Jer 31:34 for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more*. That's how it should be with us but unfortunately, many brood and hold a grudge even though they make a pretence of forgiveness. It has not been let go or dealt with properly. There is a term "Indian giver". It describes someone who gives something and later wants it back. Many Christians are Indian givers when it comes to forgiveness.

I think you can get the idea that forgiving is "letting go" and "leaving". It is an attitude of our own heart that says a lot about us and how we view our own sinfulness. To illustrate forgiveness (as in Mathew 18) Jesus uses a pecuniary (financial) example. *Luk 7:41 So Jesus said, "Two men owed a moneylender some money. One owed him five hundred silver coins, and the other owed him fifty. When they couldn't pay it back, he was kind enough to cancel their debts. Now, who do you think will love him the most?"* Obvious isn't it? If forgiveness for us is a small deal, it will not be highly prized and will not generate the love to the forgiver or the forgiven. We will not be good at forgiving.

When we exhibit a spirit of forgiveness, we are revealing our attitude to forgiveness. We are also, and this is important, showing how much we love Christ. People who have difficulty seeing their sin do not have a deep love for Christ. Simon the Pharisee took Jesus for granted. Read Luke 7:44ff. *Luk 7:47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little*. How much were you forgiven?

How little and easy are the things that you and I have to forgive, compared with the mountain of our own sins that we lay at the feet of Christ. *Psa 130:3 If you kept record of our sins, no one could last long*. CEV. Its so easy to be self righteous like Simon the Pharisee. Much of what we post as sin in others are mere preferences and life choices. We makes lifestyle judgements about what people wear, how they look, what they drink, what they eat, what activities they do and much more. We can become very critical of those who do things differently to us but one of the lessons we need to learn is the difference between sin and choice.

What is a sin and what is an allowable free choice in life? What are the limits of the liberty of conscience? Forgiving is often difficult because we do not take the time to **define if the offence is a sin**. *Mat 23:23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone*.

If we knew how much we had been forgiven, we would be more forgiving. I have though, seen some people who love being hurt. When they think that they have been sinned against, instead of seeing their own faults and remembering their own forgiveness, use the sinner as a step to climb up above them and use it to exalt self-righteousness. A put up not a put down. *Luk 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican*. God wasn't listening to the Pharisee (he prayed with himself). He was full of himself and his own goodness. Look God what I'm putting in the collection, look God I'm wearing a head covering, look God, I've been baptised, look God I got to church early, look God I've dressed properly for church, look God I read the Authorised version of the bible!

So far, we have seen that forgiveness restarts the clock on relationships and erases completely any memory of the offence. There are no limits on how many times we should forgive a person and no offence is for us unforgivable. Our ability to forgive is linked to our love for Christ and our

appreciation of the depth of His forgiveness to us. Let us now examine the process of forgiveness outlined by Jesus.

Confronting the sin

*Luk 17:3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; **and if he repent**, forgive him.*

You can show a forgiving nature but it is clear that you cannot truly forgive someone who is unrepentant because there is a link between repentance and forgiveness. *Act 5:31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.* Some people are so aware of sinning that they do not need to be told, they will come to you, others are not so forward.

There are however, a truly spineless set of people who will harp on about forgiveness as long as they don't have to get involved at a personal level. They will gossip about it with no intention of acting upon it or they will not deal with it in a constructive way (see John 8 where it is about punishment not reconciliation and forgiveness). Let me give you another example. A person feels that something that you are doing is wrong, **it may not even be a sin** but it annoys them. It may be that they don't like your other friends, or that you enjoy a glass of wine, or that you have expensive tastes, whatever, they don't like it. It may be a sin, a relationship that is not working, or something personal. The issues may have absolutely nothing to do with the person who raises the issue but it has in some way affected them or it may be something that they have against you. Even so, they have no constructive solution.

Because they cannot confront issues head on and constructively, what they do is use the ambush strategy. They throw the issue into in a conversation, usually when others are present and when you are least expecting it. They ambush you. For example, they may accuse you of having an issue with someone even though they do not have a complete story. It comes out of the blue. Not many of us are smart and quick enough to deal with this stone throwing approach. Once you realise that a stone has been thrown through your window, the perpetrator has run off.

You see, the rebuke, if that is what it was, was not designed to be constructive, it was retaliatory. If the person had a true concern for your well being they would have created an environment where you could think and respond carefully together, "just between the two of you". The lack of this approach tells me that a person is more concerned to broadcast the trespasses than pardon them. They want to get back at you and not forgive you. Retaliate not reconcile.

If sin is to be dealt with, it has to be confronted properly, not swept under the carpet. Forgiveness is not walking around the mess on the pavement. It is an attempt to clear it up. You do not help your brother or sister if you let them go on in their sin. *Mat 18:15 If one of my followers sins against you, go and point out what was wrong. But do it in private, just between the two of you. If that person listens, you have won back a follower.* CEV. (Read Mat 18). Jesus shows that it may require 3 stages.

- Stage 1. One to one.
- Stage 2. If unresolved bring witnesses (they and you can bring these).

- Stage 3. Take it before God's people.

The AV says that the final stage is to take it before the "church". **What church?** Note that Jesus is speaking in the Old Testament (pre-resurrection) and the word *ekklesia* (church) that He uses, is used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew words for Congregation and Assembly. Tell it to the congregation. *Mat 18:17 If he ignores these witnesses, tell it to the community of believers.* GW. I like this translation. It does not say that it has to be the place where you worship, your "local church". Remember, churches were never defined by denomination in the New Testament, they were defined by geography, for example, *1Co 1:2 Unto the church of God which is at Corinth.*

Sin is ultimately a community matter (Deut 21:3, Deut 21:21). Your local community of believers, your Christian neighbours, can judge the matter and among them it does not have to be the senior people. *1Co 6:4 ... set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.* The point is that having escalated the issue beyond one to one, there comes a stop point. It has either been resolved or settled or it has ended in disagreement. Either way it can go no further and the matter is ended.

I know Christians who cannot do that or are afraid to do it. They will try and tell the person by osmosis, that is, they will tell someone else in the hope that they will do it for them. Otherwise they will shelve it. This indicates an unwillingness to confront sin head on and as a result it will lead to all sorts of compromise.

Jesus does not give us an option to tackle sin, it is not "take it or leave it", or "I choose not to pursue it", we have it handed to us as a Christian duty. We must do it.

Blind spots

Mat 7:3 So why do you see the piece of sawdust in another believer's eye and not notice the wooden beam in your own eye? GW.

There can be a great hypocrisy associated with forgiveness. It concerns the inability or unwillingness to deal with personal sin and personal problems. There is a blind spot. Each and every one of us has a part of the eye that cannot pick up light, in the region of the optic nerve, it is to all intents blind. It is as if God designed us so to warn us of our limitations. Creatures like the Octopus are designed differently and do not have a blind spot.

How does this blind spot show itself? At an individual level is the inability to see that we are committing the same offence that we condemn in another. (Read Galatians chapter 2). *Gal 2:14 So I told Cephas in front of everyone, "You're Jewish, but you live like a person who is not Jewish. So how can you insist that people who are not Jewish must live like Jews?"* Apostles are not above reproach. I know of a man who has condemned the traditions of Catholicism and yet is happy to call himself "reverend". Hypocrisy! You really have to get out of your box to see these things.

Then at a family level, there is the hypocrisy that puts on a front to show how good we are such as when we appear in church. There was a case a few years ago relating to Larry Tomzac, a great

preacher in the US. He was effectively ousted¹ from his ministry over the “teenage rebellion” of his son. In a non-biblical approach to problem solving he was vilified by the elders of the SGM fellowship from who he belatedly (about 20 years after) received an apology. When similar things happened in the other church elders lives, they soon developed a more sympathetic approach. How quick we are to forgive ourselves and our own families of sin and how ready we are to condemn others for the same thing.

Churches as groups are not exempt this hypocrisy. Take for example, the idea of church membership. People can be pressured to “join” a church by some ritual greeting or special act (christening, confirmation) when nothing of the sort is ordained by Almighty God to become part of the body of Christ. It is not something new, *Act 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.* Some churches even have “courses” leading to baptism.

Let us be clear on this point, you are not obligated to follow church rules or tradition, you are obligated to follow Christ at whatever cost. *Col 2:18 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.* I remember a so called “Christian” argument against Sunday shopping, that it would destroy the family. It was probably an attempt to get families to go to boring meetings in long dead and declining churches. The facts turned out to be that families were likely to spend more time together if they went shopping.

Condemning people for not doing things that are matter of personal choice and conscience is another form of hypocrisy. It assumes that the personal choices are sins. *Rom 14:5 Some of the Lord's followers think one day is more important than another. Others think all days are the same. But each of you should make up your own mind.* CEV. I for personal reasons do not celebrate birthdays, Christmas or other inventions. That’s my free choice and not a sin, so leave me alone in these matters and respect my free choices.

Jesus asked, “Why do you see the speck in another’s eye?” One reason for condemning others is as a way of exerting pressure upon them to come to your opinion. The so called fault, speck or splinter is nothing more than an excuse to conform you to another viewpoint that is not from Christ. *Mat 23:15 You Pharisees and teachers of the Law of Moses are in for trouble! You're nothing but show-offs. You travel over land and sea to win one follower. And when you have done so, you make that person **twice as fit for hell** as you are.* It is a short step from becoming an upholder of truth to becoming a self-righteous hypocrite.

Forgiveness from God

Luk 23:34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

I come to an aspect of forgiveness that we often fail to consider, namely the sins that are directed towards God and the sins that are directed against us personally. It is true that all sin derives its

¹ <http://thewartburgwatch.com/2010/12/13/sovereign-grace-ministries%E2%80%99modus-operandi-de-gifting-pastors/>

meaning from God's law because sin is a transgression of God's law. *1Jn 3:4 Those who live sinful lives are disobeying God. Sin is disobedience.* GW. So while all that is sinful is defined by God (not kill, not steal, etc) some will be directed more personally at me and you.

I take sins directed against God such as blasphemy, *Exo 20:7 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.* I take sins specifically directed against man such as character assassination, *Exo 20:16 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.* The 10 commands appear to have a division that mirrors these two sides of the law in two tables. *Mat 22:37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.....Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* There are sins against God that we just cannot forgive but there are sins against us that we can. Let us also make certain that we are dealing with sin and not some construction of our own. Too many make their own laws as to what is sin!

But that is not the whole story. If you think that forgiving someone who has sinned against you has dealt with the problem think again. If that was all your concern, you are a self-centred forgiver. You have left the God who made the rule of law out of the process. Jesus always pointed people to the ritual cleansing, *Luk 5:14but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.* All forgiveness must involve the Creator. *Lev 6:2 If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the LORD, and lie unto his neighbour...* There it is. If you lie to your neighbour you also trespass against the Lord. (Read Leviticus 6). The remedy involved restoration to the victim and reconciliation to God through a sacrifice of the trespass offering.

If I am forgiving someone a sin, and I should be very clear that it is a sin not a personal dislike, I should also be concerned to reconcile the sinner with God. It is not just about us. The Gospel is about Jesus and that is what we carry to the world, *2Co 5:20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, **be ye reconciled to God.*** How much evangelism and church building is about establishing our empire on the back of Christ rather than His Empire on the back of the cross? We are selfish beyond measure.

Now let us turn to the Cross and see Christ upon it as He utters the words of our text. ***"Father forgive them"***. Here at the focal point of the Universe, History and Time, smitten and afflicted of God, He is not lost in His own suffering but has compassion to others around Him. *Isa 53: he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and **made intercession** for the transgressors.* Through the blood, He looks down upon His executioners and asks His Father to forgive them and I believe that the Father answered that request. I believe that, because the relationship between the Father and Son is a unity of purpose and plan. *Joh 10:30 I and my Father are one.* It was not just kind words.

What is the consequence of that? Everyone without exception is forgiven, the devil is forgiven, sin can abound so that grace can abound? Not at all! The words on the cross are not a statement of universal forgiveness for all sins without exception. It is a statement of Christ's heart to those who had committed the sin against Him, the false witness that led to His death. That by no means deals with the "back catalogue" of sin that mankind had committed, neither for each of these people around Him, including Mary His mother who had sinned. That is because, as we have already

explained, those sins must be dealt with before the Father of mankind, the Law giver. There are two thoughts here; that we might be as self-less as Christ to forgive those that trespass against us (Acts 7:60) and that we would be ever mindful that the consequences of sin lie far beyond this world.

Unforgiveable sin?

Mat 12:31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

I bring this series to a close with three questions.

1. Can we commit an unforgiveable sin?
2. How do we square forgiveness with the “imprecatory prayers”?
3. If we are forgiving why should we “deliver” a soul unto satan?

1. Can we (Christians) commit an unforgiveable sin? *Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death.* It follows that if any of us are to survive, it is through the gift of God, forgiveness in Christ. All the world lies in wickedness (1Jn 5:19) and justly deserves death but what death? There is the death that Adam suffered “in the day” that he sinned, making him and us dead in trespasses and sin, then there is the physical death which for Christians is described as “falling asleep”, *Act 7:60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep,* and finally the second death at judgement, *Rev 20:6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power.*

What death is John talking about when he says, *1Jn 5:16 If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.* Is he speaking about an absolutely unforgiveable sin? I suggest that he could be talking about any sin, since all sin carries the death sentence. In the New Testament Ananias and Sapphira are killed for lying (Acts 5) and abuse of the Lord’s table is punished with death (1 Cor 11:30). There is no reason to believe that these punishments deprive the sinner from eternal life but they are an object lesson for the rest (see also 1 Kings 13).

Now concerning blasphemy or speaking badly about the Holy Spirit. In the context of Matthew chapter 12, Jesus had been accused of exercising demonic power, *Mat 12:24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.* Jesus power was in the Holy Spirit *Luk 4:14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee,* and the blasphemy, I suggest, is attributing the power of the Spirit to satan. If you are one who knows the forgiveness of sin in Jesus, then clearly you did not commit this sin and I know of no believer who could do this if Christ lives in him.

I asked if **the Christian** could commit an unforgivable sin to which I answer, **the Christian will not** commit an unforgivable sin.

2. Forgiveness and imprecatory prayers. If we are to be so forgiving, how can we explain the seeming lack of forgiveness in the “imprecatory” prayers and psalms? To imprecate someone is to curse them, for example, Psalm 69 which is quoted by Jesus. *Psa 69:24 Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them.* Does this sound like the prayer of a forgiving person? We may argue that this is in the older Testament and like the disciples calling down God’s wrath it was not the Spirit of the new Testament. *Luk 9:54 And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?* To which Jesus rebuked, *Luk 9:55 Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of for the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save.*

Scripture is the “expired” (breathed) word of God, not the ramblings of men. The words of David are the words of the Spirit of God in him. They prophecy and denounce the wicked while describing their end and are a glimpse into the heart of the Sovereign God (See Psalm 109 vv 9-15 and compare with Acts 1:20). In a similar way God reminds us that He has not forgotten the martyrs whose blood cries out to Him from the altar of sacrifice *Rev 6:10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, Until when, Master, holy and true, do You not judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?* This in no way implies a vengeful spirit in the saints in glory. It is the cry of the life in the blood *Gen 4:10 And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.*

We are to bless and not curse, *Rom 12:14 Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.* We are to be merciful not vengeful *Rom 12:19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.* We are to do good to those that hate us, *Mat 5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;* There is no place for imprecation in our prayers because the man who rejects Christ is already cursed *1Co 16:22 If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema.*

3. Finally, we look at the **Delivery to satan.** *1Co 5:5 to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.* *1Ti 1:19 maintaining faith and a good conscience; which last some, having put away, have made shipwreck as to faith; of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan, that they may be taught by discipline not to blaspheme.* **This is chemotherapy for the sins of the flesh** and let us observe two things. Firstly, it is by the grace of God that satan does not destroy us continually and secondly, that the purpose is to redeem the spirit not destroy it utterly.

There are few sanctions available to Christians.

a) Dis-fellowship. *2Th 3:14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*

b) Withdraw of welfare. *2Th_3:10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.*

c) Exclusion from fellowship *Tit 3:10 A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject.*

d) Avoidance. *Rom 16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.* These have in general the idea of avoidance, rejection or quarantine from potential threats to the gospel.

The more severe sanction appears to involve a discipline that uses spiritual forces. There are examples of this oppression, although the Bible does not dwell on it much. *2Co 12:7... there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. Luk 13:16 And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?* In these two examples we can see that pain or injury can be inflicted by evil powers. This is oppression and not possession that we are dealing with but the man in sin is already in satan's grasp, a step from being given over.

Why we might ask chose one sanction over another, why invoke satan rather than exclusion? I cannot answer that other than by saying that such activities should not be taken lightly and every effort should be made to understand the mind of the Lord in each situation. We would also have expected the process of reconciliation (Matthew 18 3 stages) to have been conducted before a decision is made on rejection. It may be that where an individual refuses to address the issue and walks away from the Faith, that the severe sanction is introduced. So it may be the case in 1Cor5 and 1Tim1 that the individuals did not respond to a call to confess and repent?

As Paul laments, *Rom 7:25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.* Christians walk a tightrope across the chasm of life and despite the desires of our mind, we find that ever present sin deceiving us and captivating us. There but for the grace of God go we. If we implement discipline in the congregation, it should not be for the sake of satisfying a sense of our own righteousness or for the sake of punishment alone. It should be done with the fervent prayer that the sinner may turn from his ways and repent. *Eze 33:11 Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?*

Robert Dale, the Victorian preacher said, "that Dwight L Moody was the only preacher whom he felt had a right to preach about hell. I never heard Moody refer to hell without tears in his voice." Now there is a lesson for us on forgiveness and compassion.

Forgiveness summary

- ❖ If I cannot forgive and forget endlessly like God, I cannot be forgiven.
- ❖ There is not one sin against me that is unforgivable.
- ❖ Forgiveness is a mirror of my love for Christ.
- ❖ I cannot walk away from a sin and be faithful to Christ.

- ❖ Before I seek a sin in others I must make certain it is not in me.
- ❖ Talebearers spread sins to others because they are not concerned with forgiveness.
- ❖ The brother heals and deals with the sin directly and discreetly.
- ❖ Be offended by sin not by another's personal choices (freedom of conscience).
- ❖ Use the chain of resolution (Matthew 18).
- ❖ God is in the detail and absolute forgiveness must involve Him too.
- ❖ Compassion not retribution is at the heart of forgiveness.